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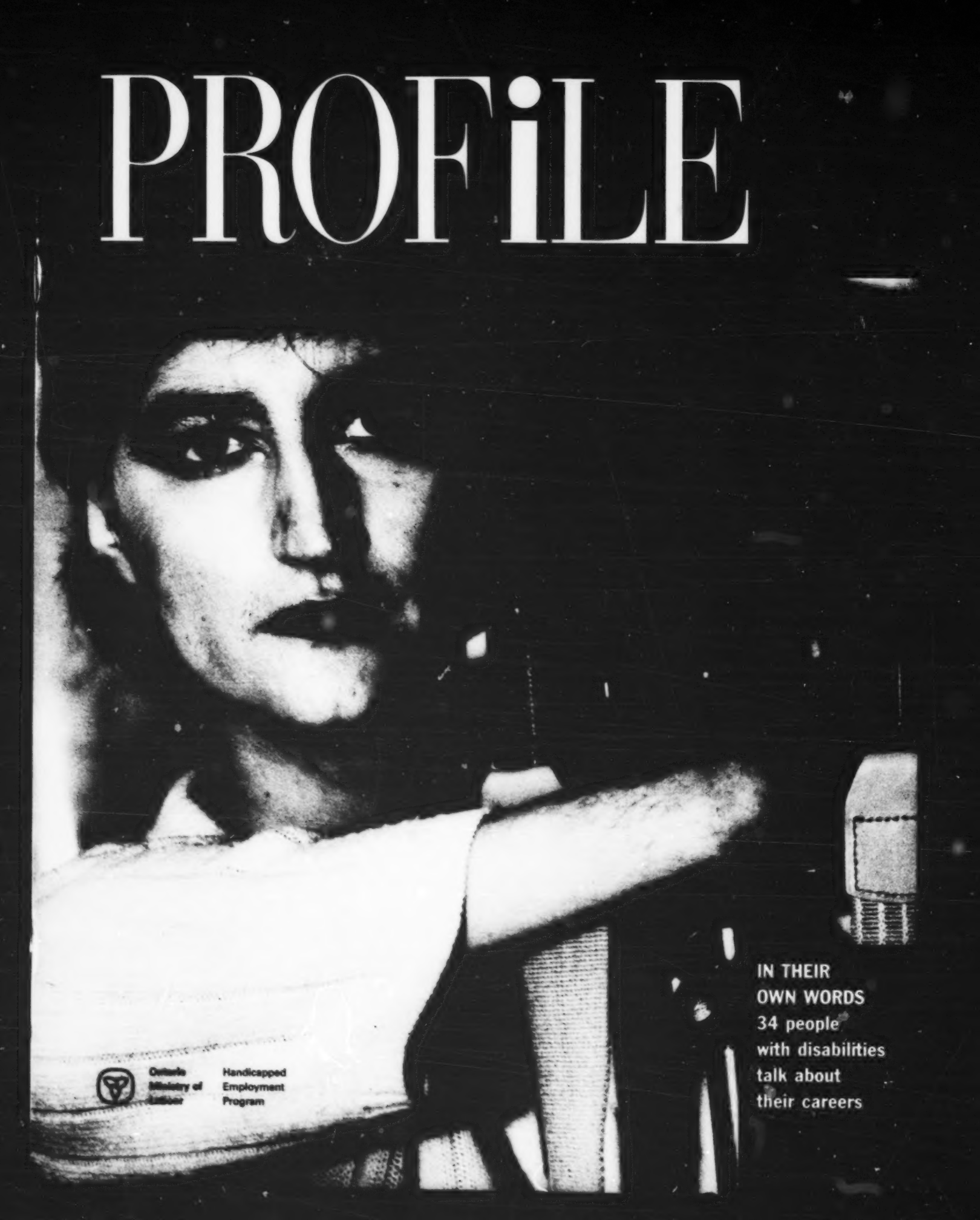

Ontario Ministry of Labour

Handicapped Employment Program

IN THEIR OWN WORDS
34 people with disabilities talk about their careers

88-04843/

NEW IMAGES

REVOLUTIONS START WITH NEW IMAGES, AND TODAY IN ONTARIO the image of people with disabilities in the work force is undergoing a dramatic change. Increasingly, barriers of attitude are being toppled, stereotypes about people with disabilities are being punctured and the doors to opportunity are opening.

Consider these images which might have been inconceivable a generation ago: a line worker who has epilepsy, an almost totally blind man who plays squash when he's not re-designing shopping centres, a university professor who has overcome an inability to spell words and to remember facts.

You will find their stories in this magazine, as well as profiles of 31 other Ontarians with disabilities living across the province, from Sioux Lookout to Windsor to Ottawa. Each found work in the competitive world: some quickly; others only after long years of frustrating search. But whatever their story, they overcame obstacles through their conviction that they could, and really wanted to, work.

These profiles show only a fraction of Ontario's community of working people with disabilities. But their stories reveal the common denominators that most experience: the demands and rewards of finding — and keeping — competitive employment, and the vital connection between working and a feeling of independence and self-worth and of making a contribution to society.

A common thread in their stories is the need to conduct a hard-nosed evaluation of their own strengths and to decide exactly what they had to offer on the employment market. But no matter how severe their disability, they all found something to build upon: a talent or interest in a specific area — communications, trades, the professions, small business, technology or community service. In some cases they simply had an openness to try whatever came along, however new and strange a direction it may have seemed. Without fail, they had the determination to succeed, and a positive outlook, that employers are lucky to find in any employee.

Employers themselves are joining the revolution. They are finding that once they abandon the stereotypical images that block people with disabilities from the work force, the physical adaptations are relatively easy to make. A ramp for a wheelchair, a talking computer for a person who is blind, even an interpreter to help an employee who is deaf participate in a staff meeting — all are becoming familiar and useful tools for employers.

Profile reflects the input of many people both within and outside the Ministry of Labour. The Handicapped Employment Program particularly wants to thank all those who agreed to be profiled, as well as Public Good for editorial and design services.

Cover: Rosemari Comisso. *See page 26.*

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OPEN FOR BUSINESS

From factory floors to corner offices, the opportunity to make your mark has never been greater

COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

CATHERINE FRAZEE

WELL BEFORE SHE GRADUated from Ottawa's Carleton University, Catherine Frazee drew a bead on the working world and prepared for it methodically. "I was very conscious of the need to stockpile experience."

She was born with amytonia — a muscular deterioration — and has used a wheelchair all her life. "I took advantage of every opportunity to work part-time at school and during the summers." She joined the debating club — "the ultimate nightmare" for her — to overcome her self-perceived weakness in communicating with poise under pressure. To help meet people and practise social skills, she took a part-time job as a campus tour guide.

By the time Imperial Oil hired her in 1981, at the age of 27, her "stockpile" had grown to include two years at law school in Halifax, government contract work and the management of a one-year youth project in Nova Scotia. Her instincts for the job market were such that, during a six-month period of unemployment, she advertised to write resumés, "to keep busy and also, when it came to my own resumé, to account for that gap between jobs."

Frazee had the advantage of parents who could provide her with an attendant from the age of 18, until she could bear the cost herself. Now she is Imperial Oil's product standards co-ordinator in Toronto, where she also edits technical brochures and literature. She uses a dictaphone for much of her writing to compensate for her weak hands and arms.

"I was always encouraged to pursue my interests in English and literature [her university core subjects] because I guess you can never go too far wrong if you communicate well. I rely heavily on basic communications skills — looking people in the eye, speaking directly to them, remembering their name and using it — basic skills for anyone, really."

FINANCIER

BOB CANNING

IF YOU CAN'T USE YOUR RIGHT HAND, it really doesn't take long to write with your left. As time goes on it gets more and more legible." Bob Canning, 61, says being in a wheelchair since the age of 27 was "an engineering problem, not a psychological one. I never had any great problems with anger or adjustment."

Polio put Canning into a Toronto hospital for 20 months in 1953. At that time he was a 27-year-old bond trader with the brokerage firm of

From her computer terminal in Toronto, Catherine Frazee sends information to Imperial Oil offices across Canada: "I was very conscious of the need to stockpile experience."

"They bring in a sign-language interpreter for occasions like group meetings."
CROCKFORD

Bell Gouinlock Limited. While in the hospital, his full salary was paid because "Mr. Gouinlock believed it was a good investment and that I'd get back to work." He left the hospital as a wheelchair user, with only the use of his left hand but with a resilient attitude and the opportunity to go back to his old job.

No physical changes at the office were required to accommodate his wheelchair. On people's reactions to his wheelchair, he says, "When people first meet me, they say they see the wheelchair. That lasts for about 10 minutes. I haven't experienced patronizing attitudes or pity, but perhaps that's because I'm so outgoing."

Canning became president of the firm in 1972, sold it in 1986 and is now a director of the securities firm First Marathon Securities Limited.

"I think people misunderstand physical handicaps. They think it alters your personality or your motivation. There's no connection. If you were a success on your feet, you'd be a success on your seat. People either had it before [the handicap] or they didn't have it. But most people have it, and cope with the world."

ACCOUNTING CLERK

SUSAN CROCKFORD

SUSAN CROCKFORD'S EMPLOYER, Imperial Oil, makes sure her deafness does not impede her work as a volumetric accounting clerk in their Sarnia office. "They bring in a sign-language interpreter for occasions like group meetings, or when speakers come in from head office in Toronto. Apart from that, I'm a good lip reader, and I write out messages if people find my speech too difficult to understand."

Deaf since birth, Crockford joined Imperial Oil 11 years ago, after leaving a job in Hamilton to follow her husband to Sarnia. "I was trained on the job here. One person would sit beside me and explain everything to me, and if I didn't know what to do, they would help me. That worked well because I could read their lips easily.

CANNING

"There's a little bit of communication with people in the course of my work. Most of the people here know me, and I haven't ever had any problems communicating with them. If other people can read my lips, then it's fine, they can understand me. My voice isn't that great.

"People treat me as an equal. I find the only barrier is the telephone. The people here help me by making phone calls for me. But for work I usually don't have to make phone calls — I can get around that by sending out memos."

PACKER

DOUG HEPBURN

DOUG HEPBURN, 28, HAS EPILEPSY, a condition with a powerful stigma in the eyes of many employers. "Sometimes I've taken a job without telling them I had epilepsy, and it worked out all right. I've never really gotten fired because of my epilepsy. But I've had a hard time getting in the door, for sure."

Hepburn is a packer on the delivery line at Beecham Canada Inc., in Weston, a position he

obtained with the help of the Epilepsy Association of Metro Toronto. Occasionally the work becomes too stressful for him, and he copes by either sitting down for a few minutes or by briefly trading jobs with a colleague doing a less demanding task. "Beecham is very understanding."

Apart from stress buildup, he occasionally has seizures at work — but they're not the grand mal episodes that most people associate with the condition. During a seizure, or blackout, his mind drifts away from what he's saying or doing for a few minutes. "If I'm talking to you, I'll suddenly start talking about something else. It will all make sense. When the blackout ends, I'll pick up the original conversation exactly where I left off." Hepburn's grand mal seizures occur only at night, a common characteristic of nocturnal epilepsy.

Some of Hepburn's problems have stemmed from his medication. Once he had to convince his employer that he wasn't coming to work drunk, but that a toxic reaction to his medication created the symptoms of drunkenness. Hepburn also has cerebral palsy, which has reduced the dexterity of his right hand and has left his arm with almost no feeling.

"My biggest goal is to not let anything discourage me. If someone can open the door and show employers that epilepsy is not as dramatic as they think it is, it'll help everyone. If I can get my foot in the door, then maybe the guy behind me can do the same thing."

TRANSMISSION ASSEMBLER

RAY BELANGER

RAY BELANGER IS A FULL-TIME assembler on the main assembly line with General Motors of Canada in Windsor, working eight-hour shifts five days a week. Cerebral palsy has given him a severe speech impediment and made his movements jerky, but neither interferes with the work he does for General Motors.

BELANGER

General Motors hired him three years ago from Par-Pac, a local sheltered workshop that subcontracted the manufacturing of automobile parts from GM. At Par-Pac he showed natural leadership and quickly became a foreman. His coworkers simply adjusted to his speech. "The people at GM take their time and listen to me. At first, when I sometimes fell in the hole [fell behind on his work], they always helped me out." In fact, Belanger's co-workers also waived a union regulation that states that new workers can only start at GM through an entrance-level job, which would have been too strenuous for him.

"It took me longer than some people might take to learn the job — but they didn't mind." GM says it was Belanger's enthusiasm and willingness to take on more responsibility that made him initially attractive. They thought he could adjust to the pressures of assembly-line work, and he has proven them right.

"If someone can show employers that epilepsy is not as dramatic as they think, it'll help everyone."
HEPBURN

THE LEADING EDGE

Committed professionals are prying exciting new answers from the world of high technology

RESEARCH SCIENTIST

JON VAN LOON

THE UNIVERSITY CLASS BURST INTO derisive laughter when their professor, sketching the outline of the Great Lakes on the blackboard, drew them backward. "To me it was agony," recalls University of Toronto geology professor Jon Van Loon, who has a severe learning disability affecting his memory, spelling and reading. But that was far from his only slipup. He was a geologist who couldn't spell "mining" — it came out "minning" — and a teacher who would forget a student's question before he'd finished giving his answer. At home, he would forget his children's ages or the proper spelling of their names.

"My whole life had been a string of embarrassments connected to my poor memory, and I've been mistaken for being a slow learner, having brain damage or simply being lazy." The strain drove him to a psychological and physical breakdown in 1981. It was only then, when he was 44, that Van Loon's disability was diagnosed by a psychologist as dyslexia. By that time he had earned a PhD in the highly technical area of geological chemistry, and his scores of speeches and more than 100 published articles and books had made him a world authority in his specialty. (Mary-Agnes Balicki, also in this chapter, operates one of Van Loon's university laboratories.)

How did he make such remarkable progress against such steep odds? He attributes it to hard work and a detailed system that he invented — a series of cues and procedures for improving his reading, writing and general academic performance. In reading, he taught himself to concentrate on ideas rather than sentences, to skim and to argue difficult material with himself out loud. In writing, he learned to build upon single-word summaries or point-form skeletons, or to dictate into a tape recorder. To avoid drawing his blackboard diagrams backward, he uses overhead projectors and slides. "If non-disabled people used these study methods, many people who think themselves quite ordinary could be Einsteins."

GEOLOGIST

MARY-AGNES BALICKI

"I NEVER DO ANYTHING THE EASY WAY. I just decided I wanted to be a geologist, and that was it," says Mary-Agnes Balicki, who was captivated in elementary school by the dramatic landforms around her home in Quebec's St-Maurice valley.

However, when her rheumatoid arthritis became serious, it seemed to doom her career plans. The condition weakened her joints, preventing her climbing stairs; took almost all the strength from her hands and arms; and interrupted her

Mary-Agnes Balicki and Jon Van Loon in their laboratory at the University of Toronto. Says Balicki, "I just decided I wanted to be a geologist, and that was it."

"People call me up with problems, and I solve them."
JOLY

master's degree studies at the University of Calgary. Moving to Toronto six years ago, she tried briefly retraining as a secretary and accountant, "but I got fed up with it. I'm a geologist, so I applied to the university for a job." With the backing of two members of the geology department who have disabilities (one was Dr. Jon Van Loon) — and with half her salary paid initially by the Vocational Rehabilitation Service — she was hired to set up and run an optical emissions spectrometry laboratory to do trace-metal analysis.

The lab has been adapted to help her. Electric garage-door openers enable her to lift and lower heavy hood covers over chemical experiments. Vocational Rehabilitation Services paid for the installation of automatic doors, since the regular doors were too heavy. To compensate for her weak grip, short metal pins were attached to machinery dials and water faucets, round door handles were replaced with bar handles and wooden toggles were attached to her drawer and room keys — all of which gave her the leverage to turn things with the heel of her hand.

Her attendance record is impeccable. "I can't remember a time when I wasn't in pain. It's just a matter of degree. But I don't let it inhibit me, because then people might say, 'See, you shouldn't have hired her in the first place.' "

BARRIER-FREE
DESIGN CONSULTANT

MARK JOLY

PEOPLE LOOK AT ME STRANGELY, as if to say, 'What's he wearing, a gas mask?' " In fact, it's a microphone that fits inside a face mask, so that Mark Joly can record comments on his tape recorder without being overheard — part of the arsenal of special equipment that he uses as a barrier-free design consultant in Ottawa.

JOLY

Joly, who has very slight sight in only one eye, is president of the firm Access 20/20, and he personally inspects shopping centres, hospitals and other public buildings to recommend ways of improving access for blind and visually impaired people. The company also manufactures tactile signs to help blind people find their way around buildings and prints braille business cards. Joly worked on similar projects for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind while studying business administration at university in London, Ontario. He set up Access 20/20 in Ottawa after some businessmen friends put up the initial investment, and the federal government showed interest in buying his products.

"I use a monocular [a single-lens binocular] to survey the site, the voice mask to take notes, and I can measure short distances and heights, exactly, using my cane. Everything I read I either put, or have put, into the large-print computer." Another tool, the Visual-Tech machine, enables him to read a book by holding it under a video camera and reading the pages on a magnified television screen.

Joly also designs systems for coping. "People call me up with problems, and I solve them. I can tell a blind person how to count his money, cross the street and tell where his blue shirt is in the morning." Joly also plays squash and has taught 12 other people to play. "I can sort of see the ball hit the front wall, then I lose it. But I can locate it from the sound of the bounce, and most of the time I get to it and hit it back. I win more than my share of games."

SYSTEMS ANALYST

MIKE SICHEWSKI

WHEN MIKE SICHEWSKI, 25, graduated from the University of Western Ontario in 1984, he wasn't quite sure what he would do with his new BA in statistics. But he worked hard at finding out. "I spent a lot of time working on my resumé, making sure it was presentable. I didn't say in my covering letter that I was blind [since birth], but people could read between the lines because of my affiliation with certain organizations for people with disabilities. I think at some places I didn't get interviewed because of my handicap. There's still some discrimination out in the marketplace."

But his patience paid off with a position as systems analyst with Mutual Life, in Waterloo, in December 1986. Now, relying heavily on a speech-synthesizer computer that reads out the words of a file rather than showing them on a screen, his main role is to try to identify and solve procedural problems in Mutual Life's various departments. "It's to try to help improve their work-flow, their productivity."

Sichewski's studies in university were centred as much as possible on the practical applications of statistics, "because so much of it in the theoretical area is visual — graphs and other presentations of information." To get into the working world, he says, "you have to be yourself, put forward your strengths, and that's basically it. It's not easy by any means. You have to be willing to go out there and fight for what you want."

DESIGN ENGINEER

MARK BYRON

MARK BYRON'S ACCIDENT SHOWed that a disability need not ruin one's career plans. "I've known since I was a two-foot gaffer that I wanted to be an engineer." At high school in Ottawa his studies concentrated on maths and sciences, and he enrolled at Queen's University to take a B.Sc. in mechanical engineering. His future seemed set up.

But mid-way through university Byron, now 25, slipped on an icy fire escape, fell three storeys and broke his back. Now he is a paraplegic and uses a wheelchair. "At first I really didn't know what to do. I set aside my academic goals and dealt with all the other nonsense that was occurring at the time. I guess what turned things around for me was getting back into the routine of classes after the accident. That was a real confidence-builder."

After graduation, Byron was hired by Combustion Engineering Canada Power Systems, in Ottawa. He got the job because of his qualifications, but also because he had held summer jobs there through high school and university. As a design engineer, he helps custom-design steam generators for different industrial applications, depending on the clients' needs. He drives his own car, and the office was already fully accessible. "I'm limited somewhat in the ability to go out and visit some of our plants and installations under construction, but not to travel to talk with customers and suppliers. As far as career development goes, I don't think this is a real hindrance."

"I spent a lot of time working on my resumé."
SICHEWSKI

BUILDING BRIDGES

Professionals in education and community service are narrowing the gaps in public understanding

COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

COLIN WASACASE

"SPORTS BECAME MY OUTLET — my way of showing that I was capable and wasn't handicapped." Colin Wasacase is the executive director of the Ojibway Tribal Family Services in Kenora. His left arm was amputated when he was six — after it was bound too tightly to treat a broken bone, the circulation was cut off and gangrene set in.

"Many people told me I'd have to sit around the reserve the rest of my life, on welfare, or working as a caretaker." But from the outset Wasacase took powerful inspiration from parents who treated him like any non-disabled child, and both his father and grandfather were medicine men who fostered his interest in sports and Indian folklore. "I played hockey [goalie], football, volleyball, everything, and I won the Tom Longboat Award as the top native high-school athlete in Canada." At the University of Manitoba he was the goalie on the university team.

Wasacase's worries about being limited to a career of menial jobs began to evaporate after he won a national essay-writing contest on "Why I'm proud to be Indian." His prize was a job every summer for five years at a children's camp in New York state, where he taught native folklore and rubbed shoulders with a largely university-educated, professional community. "I met a lot of people, I got to visit New York City for 10 days each year, and that huge exposure really inspired me to make something of myself."

From that point on, he says, his disability was no longer a hindrance to his career. He took a BA, went to teachers' college, and after becoming a school principal he moved into a succession of federal government jobs that took him to Ottawa and the Northwest Territories. In 1979 he helped establish the Kenora Assembly of Resources for native and white children in trouble with the law. Wasacase helped found the Ojibway Tribal Family Services in 1985 as a service for children and families on reserves, to provide family counselling, advocacy, support services and other functions. "It's all a matter of attitude. You have to have the courage, the desire, to continue a natural type of life."

TEACHER

PAT SEED

IT WAS A CHANCE REMARK BY A TEACHER of speech in broadcasting that turned Pat Seed in the right direction. "I was doing poorly in my major, and my speech teacher told me I was excellent in speech and said I should be majoring in it." That was in Brooklyn, New York, and now Seed, who is blind, teaches speech to broadcasting students at Confederation College, in Thunder Bay.

Colin Wasacase at his office in Kenora: "Many people told me I'd have to sit around the reserve the rest of my life, on welfare, or working as a caretaker."

"It's important to take those first, terrifying steps slowly."
HATT

Still, her first love was broadcasting. She had been a broadcaster at the university station, but when she applied for a job, the local radio station said blind people couldn't do such jobs. "That was really quite a blow." Then she was offered the teaching position. "At first I resented the fact that here I could teach students how to be better speakers and broadcasters, but I couldn't do it myself. That has resolved itself now, and I take pride in my work."

She had to convince the local parallel transit system that sight-impaired people should be allowed to use the system. She has found ways of coping with her blindness. Friends sometimes help mark exams. She has both a braille printer and an ink printer attached to her computer and can read the screen with a versa-braille. Using the computer, she can print out comments to assist students in their work. "It's very involved, but teaching is something that visually impaired people can do."

She has also developed a knack for keeping discipline by listening closely and reacting quickly. "The students don't get away with a lot, let's put it that way." Seed's mother insisted she play with other children, pedal a tricycle and later take her turn in gym classes on trampolines and balance beams. "My whole life and what I've accomplished is a credit to her, really, because of the way she raised me."

TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR

PAT HATT

PAT HATT'S LEARNING DISABILITY limited her reading skills to a Grade 3 level. But she taught herself how to cope, and despite the feeling of being stupid or lazy that is often experienced by people with learning disabilities, Hatt, 39, has built a career as both an educator and an administrator in several volunteer agencies in the province.

HATT

"As positive compensations, I learned to skim and scan [written] material very well in school," says Hatt, who went to teachers' college because her high school marks were too low for university entrance. "I was a good speaker, and I found I could get a job in the primary-school area, where the teacher's voice and innovation are much more important than the book work."

As a teacher, she says, "I ran into trouble because some of my Grade 3 students were reading better than I could. Finding it too much of a strain, I went into special education, which allowed me to work with smaller groups in the specific field I knew something about, learning disabilities."

Meanwhile, she had taken on volunteer jobs with the Ontario Association of Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities. She is now president and serves on the national body as well. "The volunteer sector allowed me to learn at a much slower rate than the private sector would have. It has produced some of the major events that have made me feel that I am capable, like being successful as treasurer." She eventually earned a BA from the University of Toronto, studying one course at a time at night school and using taped material, techniques that ease the reading burden. She has also become a public speaker on disabled issues, and urges people to find their own pace: "It's important to take those first, terrifying steps slowly and to feel that you can make a difference in your own life."

SELASSIE

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

GIRMA SELASSIE

GIRMA SELASSIE ARRIVED IN Canada in 1982, a political refugee from Ethiopia in his mid-40s, with an artificial right hand — possibly not the most promising basis for launching a job search. Yet, since 1986 he has been the regional director with the Ontario March of Dimes for the Metro Toronto region.

In Ethiopia, Selassie was a military officer until he lost his right hand in a 1966 accident. He has learned to use his left hand to compensate. He turned to business administration in the private sector, and later he became ambassador to North Yemen and Italy. In Canada, he "worked as a volunteer for over three months, at first. The only way one has to gain Canadian experience is to work as a volunteer."

He approached the Ontario Ministry of Labour for information about volunteer agencies, where he was told about the March of Dimes. "It was starting to introduce computers in its activities, and I joined that group. I had no experience in computer work, but I did have it in administration. In the meantime, I continued brushing up on my subjects at night school: accounting, management, human resources." He moved from project to project, and when his present position was posted, he applied and was successful.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELLOR

KAREN GLEN-FREELAND

FOR A FEW YEARS I STOPPED TELLing people in job interviews that I had lupus, although I wouldn't advocate that approach." Karen Glen-Freeland, 35, has lupus, an incurable auto-immune disease with a wide range of symptoms that can flare up and then stabilize. Glen-Freeland has had a relatively stable period during the last five years. "It affects your ability to work depending on your symptoms, and employers are leery of hiring someone with lupus because of the unknown factors: you don't know when the person will get sick again, or for how long."

Apart from serving on a wide variety of agencies, Glen-Freeland is the founder of the Lupus Foundation of Ontario, teaches palliative care at a community college and is a rehabilitation and placement counsellor at the Paraplegic Association of Ontario, in Toronto. After establishing the Lupus Foundation, she spoke all over the province, demystifying the disease for the public and medical profession. "I like to teach people that their attitude toward life is the key to success."

She worked her way into the social service sector through gradual involvement. Her real turnaround came while recovering from a near-fatal bout of the disease in the early 1970s, when her surgeon gave her part-time work as a medical dictatypist. "That really gave me a start. It made me feel that I was capable, that I was not an invalid. It was so important to have that chance."

"I like to teach people that their attitude is the key to success."
GLEN-FREELAND

THE IMAGE MAKERS

Actors, craftspersons and writers are defining imaginative new roles for themselves

BROADCASTER AND WRITER

DAVID ONLEY

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE SEE DAVID Onley every day, announcing the weather and frequently commenting on the U.S. space program, on Toronto's CITY-TV. But his professional success grew, ironically, from two major setbacks at university. At the age of three, polio left him using leg braces and a cane, and after one year of law school he dropped out, largely because the physical grind was too demanding. Before law school, he'd been forced to abandon a master's course when the school had refused to find him a parking spot near a door.

Onley, 37, spent most of the next three years in his parents' basement. But far from licking his wounds, he was hard at work writing a novel, *Shuttle*, about the U.S. space program, his passionate interest since youth. The book was published just as the real space-shuttle program began, in 1981, and became a bestseller. That success led to radio and television appearances as a guest expert, where Moses Znaimer, president of CITY-TV, noticed him and offered him the job.

"The capacity to write and the technique of writing that I learned in the last few years of university put me in good stead to write the novel. And the experience of law school gave me the stamina I needed. No matter how tough the book became, I knew I'd been through rougher times at law school. Step by step I built my own credibility, and it took almost six years from the time I started writing the book until the big step to CITY-TV came along."

The camera shows weatherman Onley from tip to toe, one hand on his cane for balance and the other pointing at his wall charts. "CITY didn't try to cover up my disability. Znaimer said, 'Look, you're more comfortable with a cane, so we're going to have a cane in the shot,' which I think is an incredibly enlightened view of the world."

STAND-UP COMIC

GORD PAYNTER

I MAKE JOKES ABOUT GOING SHOPPING: 'Hey, there's a blind guy in the store. Drag out the stock from 1973!!' " jests Gord Paynter, 32, a professional stand-up comedian from Brantford who has turned his blindness into the butt of his jokes — and at the same time tries to educate his audiences about disabilities. At the age of 23, when he went blind from juvenile diabetes, he gave up "all hopes and dreams of ever becoming a comic — my goal for as long as I could remember."

Yet in the past nine years, Paynter has propelled himself from a state of embittered depression into the stable of regular comics who travel and perform at the string of Yuk-Yuk's Komedy

David Onley prepares to give an on-the-spot weather report on Toronto's Queen Street: "CITY didn't try to cover up my disability."

"Each step led me closer and closer to stand-up comedy."
PAYNTER

Kabarets across Canada, from Halifax to Victoria. "I began writing funny letters to my friends, and that evolved into writing funny one-act plays and short stories. That led to instructing and performing at a children's theatre in Brantford and then to writing and directing TV videos during the International Year of Disabled Persons. Each step led me closer and closer to stand-up comedy." The turning point came in April 1984, after his performance during an amateur night at Yuk-Yuk's in Toronto, when owner Mark Breslin offered him the full-time position.

He compensates for his blindness by walking around the room before the show, touching everything to learn the club's size and shape. He listens as the audience drifts in, waiting for telltale laughs and snatches of conversation. "If I know where a distinctive laugh is coming from, it may help me play the audience."

At first, management was reluctant to send him to out-of-town clubs. "They couldn't envision how I would get to Ottawa or Kingston. I said 'Don't worry, just tell me the name, place and date, and I'll get there.' Now they know they can depend on me."

PUBLIC RELATIONS

MELANIE RODGERS

"I'VE BEEN ASKED RIGHT ON NATIONAL television if I'm sexually active. I suspected the interviewer was going to ask the question, so with no pause or shock I said, 'We all have the capacity of being sexually active, whether we're paraplegic or able-bodied or have cerebral palsy.' "

That sort of verbal dexterity is all in a day's work for Melanie Rodgers, 29, a frequent and enthusiastic spokesperson for the disabled community in the media, as well as for Toronto's Computer Lab for the Disabled, a privately owned company where she is office manager. "I threw

RODGERS

it right back into his corner without answering his question. You can control and direct an interview if you're aware of the questions and you know what you want the public to understand about being disabled."

However, as recently as four years ago, she admits, she was anything but a good communicator. "I could barely read or write. I couldn't talk to anyone or didn't have the patience to listen to them."

She has a severe learning disorder, is hyperactive and had spent so much time in hospital having 27 operations on her legs because of cerebral palsy that she had virtually no social skills. But she underwent a transformation, at the Toronto Learning Centre, so remarkable that it still astonishes her.

With various therapies, skills-learning and drugs to control her hyperactivity and attention shortfalls, she became communicative enough to move on to the Computer Lab for the Disabled, where she showed immediate promise in using computers. A year later she was offered the job of office manager and became a spokesperson as the media called for more information about disabilities.

"I've learned different ways of explaining disabilities that are interesting to people, either Mr. Jones on the street corner or a mass audience on television. When I think of how far I've come, it blows my mind because I've learned so rapidly. I don't think that disabled people are given enough credit for the smarts that they've got."

EDITOR

STEPHEN TRUMPER

I HAD ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN journalism, but for the longest time I didn't even think about entering the field. When you're born disabled this is a big problem — you don't really know what you can do." Stephen Trumper, 33, was born with Arnold-Chiari malformation, a fusion of two bones in his neck. It caused nerve damage, which means he has almost no use of his left arm and walks with a pronounced lurch from a weak left leg.

But Trumper found out exactly what he could do after many years of study and hard work, and two years ago he became managing editor of *Toronto Life* magazine. After taking a BA at Peterborough's Trent University, his plans became better focussed: "I was encouraged to pursue editing rather than reporting, for a lot of reasons, one was just the physical demands of reporting." Then, while taking a journalism degree at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto, he got his big break by working part-time as a copy editor at *The Globe and Mail*. "It did a lot of good for me: helped pay for my education, and it gave me a lot of valuable experience."

After graduation in 1977, he joined *Toronto Life* as a copy editor, and worked up the seniority ladder. He uses a neck hook to take notes over the phone and found the switch from typewriters to computers "made an incredible difference to me. Using the keyboard is physically easier than a typewriter. The installer worked out a system for me where I don't have to hold down two buttons at once to perform certain functions. A couple of little things like that have really made a difference.

"There are all sorts of ways of helping the disabled, and that's well and good. But when you're disabled, there comes a point when you have to ignore all that and do it as best you can."

ANTIQUES RESTORER

ALEX HAMMILL

AT BIRTH, ALEX HAMMILL WAS diagnosed as "hopelessly retarded and crippled." Now in his early 30s, he is the proprietor and manager of Hammill's Century Antiques and Refinishing, on his family's farm at Singhampton, near Collingwood. He walks with one elbow cane, drives his own car and produces beautiful furniture. "I take great pride in my work."

His family never accepted the diagnosis, and their confidence was repaid eight years later by specialists who said Hammill was almost entirely deaf and had cerebral palsy — but was not mentally retarded. He went to the Milton School for the Deaf, getting a high school education and basic training in furniture building and refinishing. He later honed his skills at woodworking and furniture-making jobs near home, until he was laid off in 1983, because of the recession.

In the next several months of unemployment, Hammill went to work on the family farm, refinishing furniture, banisters and other woodwork. His brother Glenn, a business administration student at university, learned that Alex could qualify for a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services and arranged for the application. After the $2,500 grant arrived, Hammill's handyman uncles and immediate family used it to build a large structure to house his workshop and display room, and in November 1984 the business was launched.

"When I think of how far I've come, it blows my mind."
RODGERS

NEW PRESCRIPTIONS

The health-care field needs people with caring, compassion and commitment

PHARMACIST

LES LAM

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN A white uniform? Which ward are you supposed to be in?" New members of the Toronto hospital staff would pester Les Lam with such questions as he went about his work in his wheelchair. "People still stare at me and say, 'Are you really a pharmacist?' I don't fit their stereotype. In a wheelchair, in a hospital, you're supposed to be a patient."

Lam became paralyzed from the waist down when he did a handstand at home when he was eight years old, and severed his spinal cord. After high school he was rejected by a university architecture faculty and chose instead to study pharmacy. "Pharmacy sounded interesting, and it was also kind of a rebellious idea, since there were people who said pharmacy wouldn't be a good career for a person in a wheelchair."

His introduction to the job world was expensive. When the Toronto hospital said he wouldn't be able to reach the drugs in the dispensary from his wheelchair, "I told them I could do it, but they wouldn't believe me. It took a $4,000 elevating wheelchair to raise me up to a 'normal' height. They gave me the job, but after the first month I never used the chair again — I didn't have to — and nobody asked me why."

Now Lam owns two drugstores of his own in Toronto and still works at the hospital part-time. He uses a metre-long scissor-style gripper to reach the few items he keeps on the highest shelves. He installed a small, wooden ramp to get himself through the entrance and widened the dispensary area by several inches to accommodate his chair. Apart from that, his stores are no different from the scores of other drugstores. "Many people don't want to give you a chance, which is one reason I started my own business."

PHYSIOTHERAPIST'S AIDE

DIANNA SMART

DIANNA SMART, 28, LOST HER sight 3½ years ago when she was working as a clerk in the purchasing department at Dofasco Inc., in Hamilton. After almost two years off the job, she returned to the company to become a physiotherapist's aide.

"That was the last thing on my mind; I'd never even dreamed of that, but I said 'Sure, it's a job, I'll take it.' It's basically all been on-the-job training, and I love it."

Smart, 28, gives various treatments — ultrasound, heat therapy, massage — and leads an exercise class every week. The only accommodation she has had to make on the job is on

Les Lam uses metre-long tongs for items on top shelves at his Toronto drugstore: "Pharmacy sounded interesting, and it was also a kind of rebellious idea."

"Their attitude made me so darn mad that I made up my mind I was going to succeed come hell or high water."
JOHNSTON

SMART

the ultrasound machine. The proper frequency settings are marked with tape, so that she can find them. "Sometimes eyes could be a hindrance with massage treatments, because you can find the points a bit better without your sight."

Smart uses a dog guide, and a neighbour drives her to work — he volunteered after reading about her situation in the local press. "Dofasco thought for a while of making me a switchboard operator. I'm glad I got this, because I love people and love helping them. Now it seems like the natural place for me to be."

HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

LES JOHNSTON

"I WENT BACK TO MY PREVIOUS EMployer after being released from the hospital, and they said they wouldn't have a 'cripple' in the office — just as simple as that," says Les Johnston, now the administrator of General Hospital in Sioux Lookout. "Their attitude made me so darn mad that I made up my mind I was going to succeed come hell or high water."

He had just moved from Northern Ontario to Winnipeg in 1954 when he contracted polio, which left him with leg braces, a back brace and crutches. Johnston knew that a return to the railroad switchyards, where he had worked, was out of the question, because of the demands of the job, but he wanted to get back into the work force.

"The March of Dimes director said, 'Don't worry about your former employer. I'm sure you'll end up with a better job than they could ever offer you.' And he was right. He asked me if I'd be any good at accounting. I said, 'I haven't got a clue,' but I did well on the aptitude tests and then did well in the courses. As to motivation, I had two children and a wife that I hoped I could support again." The March of Dimes arranged transport for Johnston to and from school and generally encouraged him.

He found a provincial government job in Manitoba through a newspaper ad and later applied for — and got — the Sioux Lookout job in 1957. Now he often uses a wheelchair to ease recent arthritis, and he devotes a huge block of his time to volunteer work for community organizations — "to give something back for all the help I got."

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

LOUISE ANNE HASS

"PEOPLE WITH HEARING IMPAIRments often get into computer work, or other areas that don't require very much verbal communication. But I like, and want, contact with other people." Louise Anne Hass, 30, of Renfrew, has made a career for herself as an occupational therapist in several psychiatric institutions, employing a variety of techniques to cope with her disability in a profession where the ability to hear can be vitally important.

Hass developed her disability during a severe case of pneumonia when she was 18, and having to rely on a hearing aid made her depressed about her career prospects. She joined the army, but

when her disability was discovered, she was given an honourable medical discharge. Then she set her sights on a career where hearing was incidental — as a maker of prosthetic limbs. "But I met a deaf teacher who persuaded me to follow my instincts for relating to people and to study occupational therapy." She enrolled at the University of Toronto in 1978, the Vocational Rehabilitation Services provided a FM system to amplify lectures for her, and fellow students helped keep her notes and materials up to date.

After graduation in 1981, employers helped her by installing voice-control telephones in her wards and by giving her an office with good acoustics. "Incidental noises really interfere with a hearing aid, but you have to listen for even the most casual comments with psychiatric patients. I have offices that are away from street noise, are carpeted and have insulated ceilings. I also try to hang pictures that have cork backings — all ways of cutting down extra sounds, which interfere with what I'm trying to hear.

"I explain to my patients about my disability and some of them are able to accommodate me by speaking clearly. But many aren't able to." Worried that her disability is worsening, and that she might miss a critical comment from some patient, Hass is planning to re-route her career in the direction of massage therapy and individual stress counselling. "That way I can still remain in the medical field, without taking the risk of being negligent toward my patients."

McKELLAR

"The turning point came when I met a deaf teacher."
HASS

PSYCHIATRIC NURSE

SUE McKELLAR

CYSTIC FIBROSIS IS A HEREDITARY disease that causes thick glue-like mucus to be produced excessively in the lungs. This creates an ideal breeding ground for infections. For Sue McKellar, 32, of Scarborough, cystic fibrosis requires three 45-minute therapy sessions each day — one right before and one right after work. "CF makes me cough more than the average person. I can get short of breath after extreme exertion."

Digestive enzymes are not produced by the pancreas, so McKellar must take replacement enzyme pills every time she eats, along with vitamins and antibiotics. But McKellar, married with a son, has made a career as a psychiatric nurse and is intensively involved in the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and community health organizations.

"Through my experience as a patient in hospitals I became comfortable with the setting. I decided, after watching many nurses, that they needed more good ones, so I went into nursing." CF was a problem at school because the bacteria in her lungs was perceived as a cross-infection threat: she wasn't allowed to work with cancer patients or people with burns, and she had to wear a mask when entering the newborn nursery.

After graduating with a bachelor of science degree in nursing, her condition almost prevented her from being hired at Toronto's Clarke Institute. There was a concern about extended periods of time off due to illness, which if it happened would place a heavier work load on other staff members. The psychiatrist in charge of the unit supported hiring her, saying, "She has a chronic condition, and many of the people we treat have chronic conditions. We don't know what it's like, but she does."

IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Career opportunities in government appeal to a wide range of interests and capabilities

LIBRARY CLERK

KATHY COLLACUTT

KATHY COLLACUTT, 25, HAS BEEN labelled mildly retarded and works as a clerk at a library of the federal Department of the Environment in Toronto. "I always liked books and reading — biographies and non-fiction especially. But I never thought I'd actually be working in a library."

She finished Grade 12, but Collacutt's entry into the working world came through the Lorimer Program, a residence and training centre in Toronto maintained by the Metropolitan Toronto Association for the Mentally Retarded. The two-year program taught her general life skills at first, then concentrated on her choice of an employment area — library sciences — including learning the Dewey decimal system. While staying at the centre, she moved into part-time work at a public library and decided to take the full-time federal position late in 1986. She works each afternoon in a different part of the federal building, microfilming files from computer disks.

Her first six months on the job were considered a teaching-training period, when a counsellor from the Lorimer Program, Denise Desrosier, assisted with on-the-job training. Collacutt learned much faster than expected, and Desrosier only had to attend for a few hours the first two weeks. "The afternoons were difficult at first, photocopying, because I had a hard time re-winding the microfilm. But I got used to it after about two weeks. The library work I'd done before, and it wasn't difficult."

PROBATION INTAKE WORKER

WINNIE MAGNUSSON

"WHEN YOU BECOME DISABLED and you're sitting at home, you don't know what you can do," says Winnie Magnusson, of Kenora. "You've got to find out what your strengths are, find your niche and go for it. Probably the best way to do that is through community volunteer organizations."

Magnusson, who has used a wheelchair since she developed polio in 1953, at 19, has followed her own advice. She is now the probation and parole liaison officer between the court and probation office in Kenora, a position she secured with the Ministry of Correctional Services in 1981. By that time, she had long since married, raised a family and 15 years ago started two small businesses, a bridal service and a telephone answering service. She had also made herself well known around town for her volunteer work with several organizations, including Persons United for Self Help (PUSH).

Kathy Collacutt helps keep the books in order for the federal Department of the Environment in Toronto: "I never thought I'd actually be working in a library."

"We were up against inaccessible minds."
HARTE-MAXWELL

"My companies were largely seasonal, and since my husband was not well, I thought to myself, 'It's time to go and get a steady income.' I knew the probation and parole people wanted to hire a disabled person for the job — because of my work with volunteer organizations, they had asked me to suggest someone. I called them and said, 'I've got someone for the job — me.' That's how it all began. Becoming involved in your community opens a lot of doors for you.

"It can take some of your co-workers a while to get used to you. They're not sure whether you're up to it or not. But that didn't last too long. Now, sometimes they forget that I'm in the chair, and I think that is just so good."

POLITICIAN

LOIS HARTE-MAXWELL

ON HER 10TH BIRTHDAY, SHE OVERheard the doctor say she'd never walk, or even be able to sit up in bed, because her polio was so severe. So much for the experts. Today Lois Harte-Maxwell is an alderman in Peterborough who walks with one leg brace and a cane and who has packed the last two decades with vigorous lobbying on disabled issues, as a community activist and organizer — and as a wife and mother.

She cannot climb stairs without assistance, and ice and snow make walking extremely difficult for her. She taught herself how to walk "by falling again and again, covering myself with bumps and bruises. Later I just decided that I'd go where everyone else goes. I don't hesitate to ask for help if I need it."

Her activism began in the early 1970s, as campaign secretary with a volunteer agency. As president of an organization of disabled people, she directed the publication of a guidebook on the city's accessibility to disabled people and launched a two-year campaign to organize a parallel transit system in the city. At the same time, she lobbied the provincial, federal and municipal governments on issues of transport and accessibility, and to have people with disabilities protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code. In 1982 she and others won a three-year struggle to make the city hall accessible. "We were up against inaccessible minds. Their attitude was 'You can watch us on cable TV.' "

Encouraged by that success, she decided to run for city council in 1985 on a platform that focussed on the environment. "At first I wondered how I would campaign, since I couldn't go door-to-door." So, she went where people were already gathered, such as senior citizen homes and shopping centres. Her workers campaigned for her over the phone, and on election night she topped the polls, beating out two incumbents who had been in the double constituency since 1973. Now she fills half a dozen positions at council and feels her presence is a visible reminder of the potential of disabled people.

COMPUTER SPECIALIST

TOM HOWARD

STARTING IN THE EARLY 1970S, Tom Howard's colleagues in the Ontario government noticed he was becoming withdrawn and uncommunicative. Nobody, including Howard himself, knew that he was slipping into a prolonged bout of schizophrenia, which would eventually cost him his job as a systems analyst. "Even when I learned what it was, I couldn't explain to people what was happening to me — how it felt. They don't know what you're talking about." In fact, because the stigma that surrounds schizophrenia is still so strong, "Howard" agreed to tell his story only if an assumed name was used to avoid his identification.

Howard stopped showing up for work in 1983 and stayed in his room at home with a large

supply of canned food. "All I did was eat and sleep for six to eight months. My paranoia of other people had become very strong. But my counsellor kept telling me that normal life would return — even though there were people who didn't believe it." He went on long-term disability after abandoning his job.

The acute stage of his mental illness had peaked by mid-1984, and Howard began, with a counsellor's help, to pull his career back together. He paced himself carefully. "I drove a taxi for six months. You could show up whenever you wanted. Then I worked in my cousin's computer store, as a consultant, where the hours were mine. I used that and taxi driving as a testing ground. I would work sometimes 36 hours straight to see how I handled it — to test my capacity for stress and strain. It was really a self-rehabilitation effort." At the same time, Howard learned to control the doses of his anti-psychotic drug, Stelazine, to prevent unpleasant side effects.

By 1985, prepared for regular work again, he rejoined the Ontario government as a senior analyst, and he was later promoted to senior mainframe technical support officer with another ministry. "My work references were so good, and a letter from my doctor assured them that I was fit again, that they hired me. My mind is completely clear. Life is pretty well gravy right now, compared to 15 years of struggle."

MAIL CARRIER

ROY McDONALD

ON A FRIDAY THE 13TH IN 1960, Roy McDonald, an Ojibway from the White Dog Reserve, fell under a moving train. The accident cost him his right leg below the knee and his left foot. But he put the loss behind him and began a long career of distinguished community service that brought him a nomination for an Order of Ontario in 1987.

McDONALD

McDonald now makes his living principally as a mail carrier, but he works for many community organizations, and has served on the band council for 14 years, including 10 years as the chief. In that position, he was instrumental in negotiating a settlement of $16.5 million from the federal government after local lakes and rivers were contaminated by mercury poisoning in the mid-1970s. Among many other achievements, he also helped set up the Ojibway Tribal Family Services, which provides services and care for native children from troubled or broken homes.

"When I was in the hospital after the accident, I really didn't think I could walk again, even though the doctor said I would. But then I saw a guy in the ward who had lost both legs, totally, and that gave me perspective — I felt maybe I could walk after all." But McDonald had a deeper-rooted source of strength to fall back on. An orphan from the age of two, he was brought up partly by his grandfather, the band's spiritual leader. "He gave me a lot of confidence, and taught me never to give up, in anything."

McDonald taught himself how to walk on his prostheses without crutches or canes, and soon after the accident he returned briefly to his job as commercial fisherman and guide. "I became involved in the reserve's politics and was nominated as councillor. It was partly because I could speak English [learned at a residency school], and the band knew I could speak for them. That really picked me up — I was able to return something to them, for the support they had shown me."

"I was able to return something to them for the support they had shown me."
McDONALD

THE RISK TAKERS

Setting up a small business is a way of taking charge of your own fortunes

PET SHOP OWNERS

MIKE YALE, PATTY FUHRMAN

"WE DECIDED TO OPEN THE pet shop to get us out of the city, and for a change of lifestyle," says Patty Fuhrman, 37. She and her partner, Mike Yale, 43, own and operate the Huntsville Pet Shop, in Huntsville. Both are blind and use dog guides; they also share a background of more than a decade as activists in disabled causes and groups. "We had set such a pace with our work we were geared for burnout. Now we're living the life we wanted to lead."

They bought an existing store and hired two full-time staffers to run the day-to-day operations. They also pay a bookkeeper to come in once a week and keep their records orderly. "Bankers could get nervous that people who are blind would let their books turn into a mess. We didn't take any chances there," says Fuhrman.

They financed the store with their own savings, plus a line of credit from their bank. "Our experience is what got it for us," says Yale. "We wrote up, in very fancy form, detailed resumés; short-term, medium and long-term goals for the pet shop; a financial breakdown of what our income was; and so on. When the banker saw these documents laid out in front of him, before he even asked for them, I think that went a long way in helping us. That comes from our experience — we know the way to lobby a case."

"With the kind of ambitions and goals that people like us have, we're not about to be told no if we think we can do something," says Yale. "If you're knowledgeable, you can do it." Both describe themselves as natural rebels. Fuhrman last worked at Employment and Immigration Canada, and before that at Revenue Canada and several consumer groups for people with disabilities. Yale, born in the United States, is an author and former farmer and paralegal worker, and has been involved in many advocacy issues.

Sighted for her first two years, Fuhrman has a vivid ability to picture how the store looks. Says Yale: "People are amazed at first when Patty says things like, 'I think these boxes would look better on that shelf, arranged like this.' We know how to keep the store looking inviting, even though we can't see it. People in Huntsville have rewarded our hard work."

PHOTOGRAPHER

ROSEMARI COMISSO

"I WAS GETTING DISGUSTED WITH THE job interviews: some of the answers I was getting were just incredible," says Rosemari Comisso, a Windsor photographer. "One woman told me she wouldn't hire me because the part-time workers wouldn't approve of me. I said, 'That's not a reason!' "

Mike Yale and Patty Fuhrman in their Huntsville pet shop. Says Fuhrman, "Now we're living the life we wanted to lead."

"Farming was the only thing I wanted to do."
ROSE

She was born without arms past the elbows and uses an artificial leg. In her 35 years, this prize-winning photographer packed in an enormous range of experiences. For 10 years, she worked as a sales clerk, secretary and teachers' aide. After returning to university for a BA in communications studies, she produced a weekly column for both the Windsor *Star* and CBC radio on disabled issues, while working full-time as a social worker.

Hoping for one steady occupation, she resigned all three and spent the next six months looking for a job. But her disability, she knows, blocked the way. So, after taking a community college course on how to start a small business, she turned her hobby of photography into her job. Now her photographs hang on many office walls around Windsor, including the Chamber of Commerce.

She is an active member of the Windsor Press Club, Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau and Women's Economic Forum; is chairperson of a Chamber of Commerce Action Committee; and is a representative on the Ontario Advisory Council for Disabled Persons.

Her only job adaptation is a button that makes the camera shutter easier to push. As for her work, "I love having complete control, and I find in business it's a lot easier to deal with the top people in other companies. They've worked hard to get where they are, and so they appreciate your struggles to get started."

FARMER

GERALD ROSE

GERALD ROSE WAS A 28-YEAR-OLD farmer when he had a tractor accident, in the summer of 1971. Now, at 44, he's still farming his land at Ailsa Craig, near London. The accident paralyzed Rose below the waist, putting him in a wheelchair, but he still

ROSE

drives the farm tractor and the combine to bring in harvests of seed wheat and seed oats, commercial corn and silage corn for his beef cattle.

"It's not as easy as it was before, but as long as you've got a bit of a stubborn streak, I think you'll succeed," he says. To accommodate his wheelchair, Rose had a ramp built connecting his house with the adjoining toolshed. There, he has a specially built lift — a boat-winch motor that runs off the combine battery -- that hoists him up to the combine's seat. He pulls himself into his tractor, using pipes that he welded on for handholds and extra steps for his feet. Rose installed his own hand controls for the brakes and accelerators in both machines and traded in his manual gearshift combine for an automatic one, which is easier for him to drive. He takes a two-way radio with him in case he needs to call for assistance in the fields.

"When this sort of thing happens, you have to inquire and find out where to go. I just happened to run into a guy that was the same way, a farmer down in Chatham. He showed me how to adapt the machinery."

Since the accident, Rose has more than doubled the size of his farm, to about 400 hectares, and has hired a man to help with the work. "There was no decision to make after my accident. Farming was the only thing I wanted to do."